

## Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 IO-13 EB-08 DLOS-06  
SAL-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03  
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06  
AID-05 DHA-02 ORM-02 OMB-01 ACDA-07 TRSE-00 /121 W  
-----191911Z 007578 /42

R 190824Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3910

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMCONSUL ASMARA

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY SANA

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L KHARTOUM 0922

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, SU, ET

SUBJECT: OSMAN SALEH SABBE INTERVIEW WITH SUNA

SUMMARY. SUNA CARRIES LONG INTERVIEW WITH EPLF SPOKESMAN

OSMAN SALEH SABBE IN ITS WEEKLY REVIEW MARCH 18. SABBE

STRESSED NEED FOR UNITY AMONG ERITREAN FACTIONS, INDICATING MEETING WILL BE HELD SOON TO BRING THEM TOGETHER.

SABBE ALSO EMPHASIZED NEED FOR ADDITIONAL ARAB ASSISTANCE. HIS REMARKS INDICATE ERITREANS HOPEFUL OF ACHIEVING INDEPENDENCE RELATIVELY SOON. SABBE SAID ONE INDEPENDENCE ACHIEVED ERITREA WOULD WISH LIVE PEACEFULLY ALONGSIDE ETHIOPIA AND THAT TRANSIT RIGHTS TO ERITREAN PORTS WOULD BE GRANTED TO LANDLOCKED ETHIOPIA. PUBLICITY ACCORDED SABBE'S  
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VIEWS SUGGESTS HE MAY HAVE ACHIEVED SOME MODUS VIVENDI WITH GOS, WHICH HAS BEEN SEEKING FOR MONTHS ENCOURAGE UNIFICATION DISPARATE ERITREAN FACTIONS.  
END SUMMARY.

1. SUNA WEEKLY OF MARCH 18 CARRIES LONG INTERVIEW WITH EPLF SPOKESMAN OSMAN SALEH SABBE IN KHARTOUM ON MARCH 15.

WHILE NOTING MANY PROBLEMS STILL CONFRONTING ERITREANS, SABBE ACCENTUATED POSITIVE BY COMMENTING ON HOW FAR THEY HAD COME SINCE REVOLT BEGAN IN 1961. HE SAID CURRENT FORCE OF 25,000 FIGHTERS WITH RELATIVELY EFFECTIVE WEAPONS HAD LIBERATED MUCH OF ERITREA. ON OTHER HAND 50,000 - 60,000 ERITREANS HAVE BEEN KILLED AND SOME 200,000 REFUGEES WERE IN SUDAN. ALTHOUGH ERITREANS HAVE BEEN LARGELY SELF-RELIANT THERE WAS CURRENT NEED FOR ADDITIONAL ARAB ASSISTANCE.

2. SABBE DILATED ON INTERNAL DIVISIONS AMONG ERITREANS AND ADMITTED THAT MISTAKES HAD BEEN MADE IN PAST. WHILE NOTING ERITREANS ARE DIVIDED BY RELIGION, LANGUAGE, ETC., HE SAID COMMON LAND, HISTORY AND ECONOMY OVERSHADOWED THESE CONSIDERATIONS. TOP PRIORITY NOW WAS TO ACHIEVE UNITY AMONG THOSE FIGHTING FOR INDEPENDENCE, AFTER WHICH FORM OF GOVERNMENT CAN BE CHOSEN. SABBE ALSO SPOKE OF DANGER OF POST-INDEPENDENCE CIVIL WAR, BUT EXPRESSED OVERALL OPTIMISM THAT BLOODSHED COULD BE AVOIDED. WE ARE AGAINST VIOLENCE AS DEVICE FOR SETTLEMENT INTERNAL DISPUTES HE SAID. WITHIN TWO MONTHS CONFERENCE WOULD BE CONVENED TO ACHIEVE UNITY AND TO ELECT AN AUTHORIZED LEADERSHIP CAPABLE OF ACHIEVING UNITY.

3. REVIEWING HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ERITREA AND ETHIOPIA, SABBE CHARGED GENOCIDE HAS BEEN COMMITTED AND WAS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF EPMG. HOWEVER, HE SAID AN INDEPENDENT ERITREA WOULD NOT RPT NOT CLOSE CONFIDENTIAL

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ITS PORTS TO ETHIOPIA AND SAID BILATERAL OR INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS COULD BE REACHED WITH ETHIOPIA TO ORGANIZE TRANSIT TRADE. HOWEVER, MORE ARAB SUPPORT NEEDED TO ATTAIN TOTAL LIBERATION. ERITREANS HAD NOW ARRIVED AT STAGE OF LIBERATING TOWNS BUT FOR SUCCESS HEAVY WEAPONS WOULD BE NEEDED. GIVEN CHOS AND CONFUSION IN ETHIOPIA, ERITREANS COULD ATTAIN ITS GOAL OF INDEPENDENCE IN VERY SHORT PERIOD IF ARAB COUNTRIES ADOPT STANCE SIMILAR TO THAT OF SUDAN.

4. SABBE CLAIMED SOVIET ROLE BASED LARGELY ON ITS PERCEPTION OF STRATEGIC COMPETITION AGAINST US. HE SAID CURRENT SOVIET SUPPORT FOR EPMG WAS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED AND NOT IDEOLOGICALLY BASED. SABBE ARGUED THAT ERITREANS COULD NATURALLY WIN SUPPORT OF OTHER POWERS OPPOSING USSR BUT THIS WOULD LEAD TO MORE INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS IN AREA, SITUATION IN WHICH ERITREANS WOULD FALL AS FIRST VICTIM. ERITREANS STILL HOPED REENLIST SUPPORT OF LIBYA, AND SABBE SAID DISCUSSIONS HAD BEEN

HELD WITH QADHAFI. HOWEVER, LATTER HAS URGED  
ERITREANS TO ACCEPT FEDERATION WITH ETHIOPIA. SABBE  
SAID IT DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH LIBYA AND TO PREDICT  
LIBYAN POLITICS. SABBE CAREFULLY HEDGED HIS REMARKS RE  
EDU AND EPRP, INDICATING THAT RELATIONS WITH THEM  
WOULD DEPEND ON THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD ERITREAN INDEPEND-  
ENCE. HE SAID EDU/EPRP-ERITREAN VIEWS WERE NOT IDENTI-  
CAL ON THIS QUESTION.

5. COMMENT. WHILE SABBE HAS PAID MANY VISITS KHARTOUM,  
THIS IS FIRST OCCASION WE CAN RECALL IN WHICH GOS-CONTROLLED  
MEDIA HAVE BEEN AUTHORIZED INTERVIEW HIM AND PUBLICIZE  
HIS VIEWS. THIS DEVELOPMENT, AND CONTENTS HIS REMARKS,  
SUGGEST THAT SABBE MAY HAVE REACHED SOME UNDERSTANDING  
WITH GOS RE HIS ROLE IN FUTURE INDEPENDENT ERITREAN  
REGIME. IN PARTICULAR, IT IS CLEAR HE ECHOING CURRENT  
SUDANESE POLICY IN STRESSING IMPORTANCE OF EARLY UNIFICA-  
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TION DISPARATE ERITREAN FACTIONS WITHOUT REGARD RELIGION,  
LANGUAGE OR OTHER DIVISIVE FACTORS. WILL BE INTERESTING  
SEE WHETHER SABBE'S CLAIM RE EARLY MEETING TO ACHIEVE  
SUCH UNIFICATION WILL IN FACT TAKE PLACE--AND SUCCEED.  
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## Message Attributes

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**TAGS:** PFOR, PINT, SOPN, SU, ET, EPLF, (OSMAN SALE SABBE)  
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**Review Markings:**  
Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
22 May 2009  
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